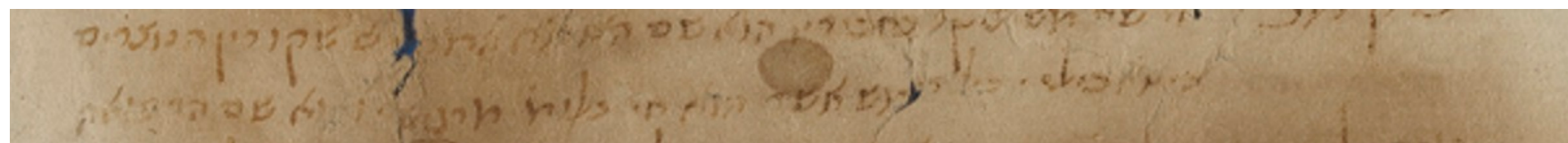


Fragment of the Month: August 2007

Moses ben Solomon of Salerno, T-S AS 143.242

Daniel Davies



cropped section from T-S AS 143.242 verso

Jewish authors began to write philosophy in Hebrew relatively late in Genizah terms. To a large extent the phenomenon was facilitated by translations from Arabic of works like Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*. Translators needed to come up with ways of expressing matters that would accurately reflect the rich philosophical terminology employed by Arabic philosophers. It seems to have taken a while for Jews in Christian lands reading the Hebrew translations to have begun to contend seriously with philosophy written in Latin. Not until the fifteenth century does there appear a widespread and original school of thought that can unequivocally be referred to as 'Hebrew Scholasticism' and that draws explicitly upon Latin sources. There were nevertheless writers operating earlier who drew on their direct contacts with Christian writers. One of those is Moses ben Solomon of Salerno who wrote a commentary on Maimonides' *Guide* which is yet to be published. Part of the commentary survives in the Genizah under the classmark T-S AS 143.242, but it's in a bad state.

The beginning of Moses' commentary on chapter forty-two of part one of the *Guide* appears in the fragment here. The original chapter is controversial since Maimonides considers the different meanings of the word life when it's used in the bible. Since there is a reference to resurrection of the dead, the thirteenth of Maimonides' 'principles of faith', and suggestions that life ought not always to be interpreted literally, many commentators took Maimonides to advocate an allegorical understanding of resurrection. Such an understanding surfaced while Maimonides still lived; he wrote a response to one sage who had accused him of unbelief in the principle and consequently of some form of heresy.

Moses of Salerno's engagement with Christian writings is attested to in what remains of this chapter. He begins by stating that the word 'life' has diverse meanings. It is the term used to refer to something which grows and senses,

which the Christians call *vitabile*, presumably a Latin or medieval Italian word related to 'life'.

While the fragment here was written long after Moses lived and does not add to our knowledge of the time or of his thought, the work itself deserves wider attention as an early example of the way in which the *Guide* was discussed across religious boundaries.

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